

# The Alaska Transportation Priorities Project

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October 20, 2005

Dear Senator,

As the nation grapples with the tremendous financial needs left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Alaska's "Bridges to Nowhere" have become an obvious target. The nearly half billion dollars earmarked for the two bridges have been criticized by everyone from Pat Buchanan to Garrison Kellior; from the *Wall Street Journal* to the *New York Times*.

Alaskans across the political spectrum have also spoken out in support of reprogramming the half billion dollars earmarked for these largely unnecessary projects. Alaska's newspapers have been inundated with letters and editorials calling on lawmakers to return at least a portion of the bridge money. Over 700 Alaskan residents have signed petitions or written letters urging Congress to reprogram the funding towards transportation rebuilding in the Gulf Coast.

Even before the catastrophic damage caused by this year's hurricanes, it was obvious to many Alaskans that the two proposed bridge projects are unwarranted. The Gravina Bridge in Ketchikan – which is slated to receive a whopping \$223 million in federal funds – would connect Gravina Island (population 50) to the city of Ketchikan (population 13,000.)

The Knik Arm Bridge, which is set to receive another \$231 million, would destroy a historic Anchorage neighborhood to connect with an area so remote it boasts only three dirt lanes. The Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, state legislators, local mayors, and Senator Lisa Murkowski have all raised serious questions about the Knik Arm Bridge as currently proposed.

The bridges are perhaps the most egregious of approximately \$1 billion worth of special earmark funding set aside for Alaska in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). Many of these earmarks can be described as irresponsible, like \$3 million for a documentary on the history of Alaska's infrastructure or \$15 million for the proposed Juneau Access Road - a project so controversial that one citizen swam 92 miles of Alaska's Inside Passage in protest.

Like every other state, Alaska has its share of transportation projects that are critical to our future. The "bridges (and roads) to nowhere", however, do not make the cut. We ask that you too identify a less-than-necessary project for your home state that could be sacrificed in a time of national need. It can't be Alaska alone rebuilding the Gulf Coast.

The awesome financial strain in the hurricane-affected areas of the Gulf Coast has put a spotlight on how Congress spends American taxpayer dollars. Now, more than ever, with a ballooning budget deficit and future war costs to cover, Congress must reprioritize its spending. We urge you to do the right thing and help Alaska help America by finding responsible ways to rebuild the roads, bridges, and communities in the Gulf Coast.

Sincerely,

Emily Ferry,  
Coordinator, Alaska Transportation Priorities Project